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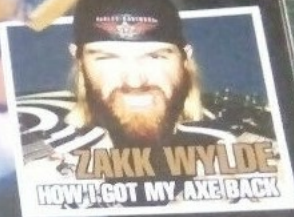
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AFTER THEIR FIRST ALBUM, *HIGHLY EVOLVED*, WAS A MAJOR WORLDWIDE HIT AND SAW THEM HAILED AS THE SAVIORS OF ROCK, CAN YOU JUST KEEP THE BALL ROLLING WITH THE NEW ALBUM *WINNING DAYS*? STORY BY JEFF LANE. PHOTOS BY MARTIN PHELLEY.



he *Vibes* are overseas, on the promotional trail for their new album *Winning Days*, due out March 22nd, and preparing for a tour with fellow Aussie rockers Jet. After the huge success of their first album *Highly Evolved*, which was a platinum record all over the world and the first on the cover of too many magazines to mention, they are about to enter difficult second album territory. With their trademark beach self-conciousness, it is not something you could get the band to admit to. Though frontman Craig Nicholls told Rolling Stone that the band considered simply re-releasing *Highly Evolved*, "I don't even know if I need that," but if I tell you it, I was probably exaggerating. I'm proud of this album as well. We enjoyed making both albums and this, I think, is a really, really, do something as well, something powerful." Nicholls is talking to us via a mobile phone from a tour bus somewhere in northern hemisphere, and the line is, to say the least, atrocious. Every now and then, through the garbled noise, something intelligible comes through, and I then, through the garbled noise and telecommunications rather than Nicholls' duplicated recreational habits.

The band once again chose to work with producer Rob Schnapf, who is best known for his work with alternative acts such as Beck, Elliot Smith and Guided by Voices. I ask Nicholls how they originally decided on Schnapf, who is perhaps not an obvious choice to record a band who has been integral to the post-war rock movement, a genre which ironically has its sights set firmly on the past, and a band that Pitchfork.com famously referred to as "a dad rock review of *Highly Evolved*."

"We wanted to record an album together. He heard some of our demos, and we went to meet him. We did our first album with him and then we did our second album with him. *Mellow Gold*, that was a big album for me. I was looking for that when it came out, it's great. Other things as well. Guided by Voices. I loved that as well."

The new album *Winning Days* was recorded in upstate New York at Bearsville Studios, which is one of the few top studios left anywhere in the world that is strictly analogue. It is also one of the most famous, having played host to titans such as Mudley Waters, the Rolling Stones, R.E.M., Todd Rundgren, Rush, Alice Cooper, the Dave Matthews Band and 10,000 Maniacs. "It was good. It was good that we got to go there because it was a real cool place. It was summer time, and we heard a lot about it, like, Bob Dylan recording here. It was definitely interesting for us."

That Bob Dylan recorded at Bearsville is a common misconception it seems. You would assume that a studio with such an impressive history wouldn't need mythology built up around it, but there is only one Bob Dylan, and since Bearsville Studios were established by Dylan's manager Albert Grossman, many assume he recorded there at some stage.

Since Grossman died in 1986, Bearsville Studios have been run by his widow Judy, who is the woman on the cover of Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home*. Big Pink, the house where Dylan and The Band recorded *The Basement Tapes*, is only a mile or so away in Woodstock, so although he tended to stick to Columbia studios and never recorded at Bearsville, the Dylan links are numerous. But enough about Bob, let's get back to the *Vibes*.

"Well, it wasn't intentional, but it just so happens that the music we listen to, some of it's punk rock and some of it is the Beach Boys, or we like the Chemical Brothers as well, but we don't consciously go into the studio saying, 'this track's going to sound like the Beach Boys' or whatever. It's just that comparisons are always drawn with music and bands and bands from the past and that, which is ok I think. We are trying to do our own thing, which includes a lot of vocal harmonies, even for the more heavy material. We were toying with arrangements and each one is an individual piece of work."

Nicholls is addressing the suggestion that the new album has a more pronounced Beach Boys influence than *Highly Evolved*, which certainly hinted at it on tracks such as "Autumn Shade". This time around, the band's confidence

in the studio and the move towards a more psychedelic sound have helped them squarely in the Beach Boys' sound-alike camp, circa 1970 or so.

While the Beach Boys comparison is an accusation that is routinely levelled against bands that utilize excessive vocal overdubs (yeah, that's right, there are actually about twenty vocal tracks on "Winning Days"), there is more to it than merely looks and arrangements, with the band constructing weird soundscapes that sound straight out of the post-Sonic period, as the boys' music no longer captures Brian's effortless vocal straggles while the rest of the band is guided in best upstairs. But enough about the Beach Boys, let's get back to the *Vibes*.

"Uh, well we kinda just like, go with the flow of each song. The way I was for the first album was I wanted my vocals to sound different on every song. I don't know, I guess it's hard to describe, but I wanted the kind of vocal sounds that you, I don't know, kind of really high sounds, like the Beach Boys, who could do like the harmonies, and stuff like that. The *Vibes*, they use a lot of vocals, we were influenced by them."

With Craig laying down all the harmonies in the studio, adjustments obviously have to be made when it comes time to take the material out live.

"Well, we just cross our fingers. Patrick sings on stage with me, so we can at least do two part harmonies. Most of them are three part harmonies on the album, like on every track, I wasn't expecting "Winning Days" to have twenty vocal tracks on it. It just so happens that we like double tracking the lead vocal, that's what I always like doing, then we have a harmony for it usually in our songs, so there we double track that. Then there are backing vocals. That's the cool thing about it, there are no boundaries, well, we do have only twenty four tracks or whatever." >>

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# The Fruit Never Falls Far From The Vines

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Source: Australian Guitar

Author: Jeff Lane

Date: March 1st, 2004

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The Vines are overseas, on the promotional trail for their new album *Winning Days*, due out March 23rd, and on the brink of their tour with fellow Aussie rockers Jet. After the huge success of their first album *Highly Evolved*, which was a platinum record all over the world and saw the band on the cover of too many magazines to mention, they are about to enter difficult second album territory. With their trademark brash self-confidence, it is not something you could get the band to admit to – though frontman Craig Nicholls told *Rolling Stone* that the band considered simply re-recording *Highly Evolved*.

"I don't even know if I said that, but if I did say it, I was probably exaggerating. I wouldn't want to change it, it is what it is. I'm proud of the first album, and like, I'm proud of this album as well. We enjoyed making both albums and also, we were really trying to really do something well, something powerful."

Nicholls is talking to us via a mobile phone from a tour bus somewhere in the northern hemisphere, and the line is, to say the least, atrocious. Every now and then, through the garbled mess, something intelligible comes through, and this time we can blame satellites and telecommunications rather than Nicholls' well-publicized recreational habits.

The band once again chose to work with producer Rob Schnapf, who is best known for his work with alternative acts such as Beck, Elliot Smith, and Guided by Voices. I ask Nicholls how they originally decided on Schnapf, who is perhaps not an obvious choice to record a band who has been integral to the whole 'new

rock' movement, a genre which ironically has its sights set firmly on the past, and a band that Pitchfork.com famously referred to as 'dad rock' in a review of *Highly Evolved*.

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The new album *Winning Days* was recorded in upstate New York at Bearsville Studios, which is one of the few top studios left anywhere in the world that is entirely analogue. It is also one of the most famous, having played host to artists such as Muddy Waters, the Rolling Stones, R.E.M., Todd Rundgren, Phish, Alice Cooper, the Dave Matthews Band and 10,000 Maniacs.

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Nicholls is addressing the suggestion that the new album has a more pronounced Beach Boys influence than *Highly Evolved*, which certainly hinted at it on tracks such as 'Autumn Shade.' This time around, the band's confidence in the studio and the move towards a more psychedelic sound have lumped them squarely in the Beach Boys' soundalike camp, circa 1970 or so.

While the Beach Boys comparison is an accusation that is routinely leveled against bands that utilize excessive vocal overdubs ('yeah, that's right, there are actually about twenty vocal tracks on *'Winning Days'*'), there is more to it than merely lush vocal arrangements, with the band constructing weird soundscapes that sound straight out the post-Smile period, as the Boys struggled to capture Brian's effortless aural strangeness while the head Wilson languished in bed upstairs. But enough about the Beach Boys, let's get back to the Vines...

"Uh, well, we kinda just like, go with the flow of each song. The way I was for the first album was I wanted my vocals to sound different on every song. I don't know, I guess it's hard to describe, but I wanted the kind of vocal sounds that has, I don't know, kind of really light sounds, like the Beach Boys, who could do like the harmonies, and stuff like the Verve, they use a lot of vocals – we were influenced by them."

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double track that. Then there are the backing vocals. That's the cool thing about it, there are no boundaries – well, we do have only twenty four tracks or whatever."

Double tracking is obviously a huge part of the Vines' studio technique. Not only in terms of rich vocals, but also with guitar overdubs. Both *Highly Evolved* and *Winning Days* have a thickened texture that is at the heart of their appeal, and this reliance of doubled tracks also allows the band to exploit dynamic shifts more effectively.

"Yeah, we always double track guitars and vocals. There are a few parts on the album where maybe it's single vocal here and there, but that's usually just like, for an intro, and then it can really open up from there."

With two guitarists, the Vines face the same problem that every dual guitar rock band has ever had, which is how to delineate parts. While it is a simple exercise to exploit the power of such a line-up in the heavy bits, it can be difficult to justify a second guitar when you are going for a quieter section, which is such a huge part of the Vines routine.

"Well, we usually just come up with our own parts, we don't really talk about it, we just kinda play and it just falls into place."

The band have always been fascinated by the recording process and developed a fair idea of their recorded sound long before the sessions for *Highly Evolved*, when they would take a four-track into the rehearsal room. Recording is also an integral part of Nicholls' songwriting process, as he demos almost everything and begins working out parts for most tracks long before they hit the recording studio.

"I guess it's different for every song. Usually recording it is the best, I rarely write things down. I can usually remember it. We did it before we went to America to do our first album, we would just do it in the rehearsal room, like with a four-track. We just liked the recording side as much, well just speaking for myself, I guess I can only do that right now, but as much as actually playing in a band. Everything about it seems interesting I guess."



This fascination with recording has served them well, and they are obviously the sort of band to pay attention to the process. While many bands seem to approach the studio as a kind of endurance test, the Vines seem to genuinely enjoy the experience, which is important considering that they spent several months working on the new album.

"Yeah, well this time we felt more confident, and we were more thorough with everything, starting from scratch. Starting from the bottom floor, like with the drums, we were real particular with all that. Like what kind of kick drum we wanted, you know, what size and that, and that went all the way through, to the overdubs and the keyboard parts, and all the different sounds. I found it a lot easier this time around I guess, just 'cause we'd done it once before."

The Vines have had a wildly varied response to their live shows, with the notoriously fickle British press, who were the very ones who elevated the band to superstar status before the first record was even released, famously unimpressed by last year's shows, while the American response was considerably warmer. While Nicholls was there for all of them, he is no more sure whether the British shows were substandard or whether the American shows rocked or indeed whether he was there at all.

"I don't know which one, I don't really rate any of them, it's just kinda my...something I do as part of my weird behavior, and like, yeah, it's hard to say, like, ummm. I mean, everyone would, you know, like have their own opinions, it's cool, yeah. I would say, to me, it's like the same thing all the time, it's the way I am. I can't decipher one from another. I guess I kind of zone out, or go off with the pixies."

With the conversation turning toward the problem of the Vines' reception at home, where they have borne the brunt of the classically Australian tall poppy syndrome fully head on and antipathy to the new release is palpable, Nicholls is similarly difficult to engage.

"Ummm, I'm not really sure, it's hard to tell, because I'm really bad, with, ummm, places and stuff, where I am like...but, you know, it's, ummm, if it's...if that does

exist, you know, if there's, like, truth to that, ummm, I guess the answer is, you know, it doesn't bother me."

While Craig has been positively erudite on the subject of recording earlier in our discussion, we have reached the pointy end of the conversation and these are doubtlessly topics about which he is less inclined to open up. So it is a little surprising when he turns the conversation to the topic of how and why the band made it – though he quickly becomes mired in his thoughts and trails off again.

"It's hard to tell, we just do what we do, and like, ummm,..you know, we've worked hard, but also there's a combination of luck, like...there's a lot of good bands, you know, that may not get a chance...there's no kinda like, one person deciding who is and who isn't, or even a group of people, because it's a very random type of thing, and music affects people in different ways...so, ummm, I don't know, yeah..."

Maybe the drugs are finally kicking in. In a last ditch attempt to engage him, I ask him about Jet, who are supporting the band on their North American tour. Nicholls does perk up for a moment, indeed he seems engaged for the final time in our conversation.

"I really like them a lot, yeah. We know them and they're really nice guys. I'm all excited about getting to play with them, yeah, it's going to be great."

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While Nicholls is verbose on the topic of recording, he is no gearhead and clams up a little when it comes to talking about his guitars. The image of him writhing around with one particular sort of guitar has quickly become iconic, though it is a little surprising to find that he has no real idea how it was he came to favor that particular model.

"Yeah, well, a Fender Stratocaster, I like those. It's just what was around, they were the most common. That was the first kind that I got and I kept getting them.



I got a secondhand one first, and then, ummm, yeah...I just kinda...I just think that...I think, yeah, just because it was there...I could've easily, I mean...I guess, I never really thought about it much..."

On the new album, opening track 'Ride' takes advantage of the inherent sound of the Stratocaster in such a fashion as I couldn't imagine it being played on any other guitar.

"Yeah, they've got a very simple kind of sound, you get a good clean sound out of a Strat, and bit of a twang as well."

Craig has a little better idea of what he likes when it comes to amplification, or at least he has more varied tastes.

"Usually, it's like a Marshall. I like those Twin Fender amps, where they've got like the Reverb on them, and like, ummm...yeah, a Marshall, I guess that's the one I use. I've got a Sunn amp, that's S-U-N-N, yeah, they're great. I really like that one as well...but I've only told you what I have when I'm on stage. I play acoustic guitars when I'm sitting around."

So it is an acoustic guitar that Nicholls likes to use when he is writing songs?

"Yeah, I guess so, like...that and my imagination I think...like, yeah, that's what it seems, it seems a lot of things stem from there."